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INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
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RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHINGTON DC
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S E C R E T FREETOWN 000405

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NOFORN

DEPT FOR AF/W (JJHUNTER)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/14/2018

TAGS: [SNAR](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SL](#) [GV](#)

SUBJECT: CONTE'S WIFE TRAFFICS FORTUNE ACROSS SIERRA LEONE
BORDER

REF: FREETOWN 336

Classified By: CDA Glenn Fedzer for reasons 1/4(b/e)

11. (S/NF) According to a well-placed source with contacts in the Sierra Leone security sector, the Guinean First Lady, Henriette Conte, was stopped at the Sierra Leone-Guinea border near Kambia on August 14. In her possession was reportedly over 2 kilos of gold bullion, three luxury vehicles, several hundred thousand dollars in US currency and several hundred thousand more in Euros. While details of the stop and search are incomplete, Mrs. Conte reportedly placed a direct call to the head of the Office of National Security (ONS), Kellie Conteh, claiming that she was being harassed. In light of the armed military officers visible on the Guinean side of the border, Conteh opted to allow the the convoy to proceed, rather than create the pretext for an armed confrontation.

12. (S/NF) The origins of the money and valuables being carried are not known, but representatives from Britain's Serious Organized Crime Agency (SOCA) reported that they have been investigating Mrs. Conte for drug trafficking for some time. The SOCA agents are currently in Sierra Leone to assist with the ongoing investigation following the cocaine seizure on July 13 (reftel), and assume that the currency in her possession is likely related to drug activity (embassy note: while this can not be proven, the traffickers seized in July were captured with accounting documents indicating that the held significant financial resources, none was found on the traffickers when they were arrested). SOCA was surprised and angered that they had not been informed of the situation by the ONS prior to Conteh's orders to let her go, and Conteh himself expressed regret that they had not confiscated the considerable fortune Mrs. Conte was carrying. Further detaining her, however, could have resulted in a violent international incident which the border officials present would have been helpless to prevent or control.

13. (S/NF) Comment: News of Mrs. Conte's brief border stop has thus far been kept close-hold. The incident will likely strain the usually cordial relations between Guinea and Sierra Leone, but if kept quiet, won't result in embarrassment or the need for political posturing on either side. Should the information become public, however, it could cause unrest in Guinea, or significant problems for the Government of Sierra Leone as questions are raised as to how so much money could remain hidden for so long, only to be smuggled out of the country with the perceived complicity of the Koroma government. End comment.

FEDZER